

# THE TOMBOYISH FAIRY DIALOGUE

By CharlieGM

**Ditty for Jim Boom**

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**Rated General**

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Not long after he returned from another dimension, lab tech Jim Boom was referred to upper management. Apparently, he was in violation of company policy for ‘consorting with extra-planar Japanese women during a sanctioned training exercise.’ This was appealed to upper management, and sent back down for judgment. Jim pleaded guilty.

Why? He enjoyed his time in Gensokyo, if he was honest. No shame in that.

The managers of his department in the Atlanta branch of the occult operations corporation OCCINTEL swiftly reprimanded him. They put him on probation, which was a fancy procedure that essentially amounted to a stern warning. ‘Don’t do that again.’ Or rather, don’t do that again on company time with official assets in tow. That was the big bust they got the new agent for, taking his issued smartphone and badge (that kills demons) with him into an alternate reality without filing the proper paperwork or contacting a notary.<sup>1</sup>

Procedure at OCCINTEL made Jim’s head spin, so the sum total of multiple departments wagging their fingers at him for arcane procedure was a basic shrug.

“Can I go back to work now?” he asked his CEO over a haunted Zoom call.

Through a distorted voice and a static-brokered video feed, she said: “... well, I suppose you haven’t done anything necessarily wrong. Appeal heard. You’re fine. Go do some paperwork, and we’ll sweep this under the rug.”

The demerit on his profile was scrubbed, and all it took was a dedicated evening, sorting out the radiometric anomalies picked up by his phone while he was stuck in another world. At the time, this sounded like one late night at the office, the last one to go home.

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<sup>1</sup> The paperwork is often as dangerous as the badge. Such is the case for legally binding contracts written in Enochian epithets and slurs.

As it turned out, this was only the start of new problems.

At the scene of the crime, a lab in the basement of the Suntrust building, an energy stirred. The room had been scrubbed for entropy and extraplanar residue after Jim's return. It was not idiot-proof. Not in the non-traditional sense. The wards taped up on the walls were designed to prevent other entities, like the ones that kidnapped Jim for tea-time, from making a conscious effort to tunnel into our world.

They were not designed for the brunt force trauma of a moron.

21:03 hours. A fine frost settles on beakers and microscopes, and the old centrifuge. In the dark, through police tape, the air grows still. The barometer begins to squeal, and then, it freezes solid. A battering sound collides with normality. One. Two. Three.

It takes nine hits to break the lattice.

"Here we goooooooooo~" a cheery voice shouts.

The sound penetrated through thirty-nine floors. It transmuted from primal scream of elation to instinct on the way, found Jim in office 199, and dragged a shiver up his spine.

He spun around in his chair, backlit in the glow of an ancient Windows XP display. "What was that?" Jim asked the darkness.

The darkness kept its secrets. He was the only person on his floor. Most had already gone home for the day. He was sharing the building with the night guard staff, the Pokemon Accountant division, and a few stragglers who may or may not have been human. The important thing was - he could call for help if he needed it.

If. Thing was, Jim wasn't sure if he even heard a noise. All he had was a vague feeling in his chest that something was off, but that alone was chilling. It froze him in his seat, looking down the hall through rows of glowing computer screens and lanterns lighting the elevator lobby. He had to remind himself that he wasn't in some sort of horror movie, or a chintzy Stephen King thriller. Things don't sneak up on you in the dead of night, that's impossible. Life doesn't work that-

*Ding.* He hid behind this seat.

The elevator doors rolled open. Carefully, Jim peeked over the edge to see who it was. He caught a visible puff of air, and after that, nothing.

He let out a sigh of relief. "Great. Just what I needed. I'm jumping at ghoh-... sts..."

The air crystalized inches out away from his lips. Frosty. He was just about to gather himself to think through his plan of action, when a small figure shot up into his field of view.

"Ohayo!"

Jim fell out of his chair and yelped. "Oh shit!" Then he got a good look at the assailant, all 6 inches. "Oh? ... shit."

The monster stalking around his subconscious was a lot smaller than he expected. It was a lot less amorphous too - but not G-man slick or bounty hunter grungy. In fact, the monster wasn't very monstrous in the slightest, but very daintily sized and tomboyishly figured. It may have been a fairy girl, in a blue fairy dress, with blue fairy hair and a big blue fairy bow, with fairy winglets made of ice in patterns of three.

It - she? - posed, feet out and arms crossed. "I found you! Bwehehe."

"Hello Cirno," Jim said flatly.

"Heck yeah, it's me! Are you surprised to see me so so-"

"Not really," said Jim.

"-oon after your brief stay in Gensokyo? Hey, you interrupted me!!!"

Jim picked himself up off the floor, shaking his head. "I did. I'm in the middle of something."

"You look like you're getting to the bottom of something," Cirno snorted. "That's what it looks like to me."

Jim gave her a bemused look. It was powerful enough to knock her off balance and send her fluttering into the corkboard wall. "Forgive me, ah, I'm busy. That's what I meant to say."

Cirno flew up to Jim's face, undeterred. Immovable object, meet unstoppable stubbornness. He backed up, crossing his eyes inadvertently to look at the tiny girl. She stopped her foot on air. "You're busy?!"

Jim blinked. "Well, yes."

"Is that so?"

"Is that your line?"

"Quit dodging the question!!"

Jim mimed cleaning out his ears. "You're awfully loud for a fairy."

Cirno flourished, beating at her chest. "I'm the most powerful fairy in Gensokyo! And you! Didn't! Talk to me before you left, even though you should have because I have power in the danmaku realm! You know this, and you left! So now! I am here! To torment you and have fun with you, so help whatever god you pray to. Actually, that god is me, because I'm a powerful fairy. Worship me, or else!"

"No," said Jim.

"... drat. That tends to work."

"Threats tend to work?"

"O-on... mortals!" Cirno stammered, but she was rapidly losing an audience. Jim pulled his chair back to the desk and sat, trying to avoid eye contact. He felt a pang of sympathy - the fairy was probably bored - but he had work to do before he could think about being off the clock. So, for his sake, Jim tried to ignore her and get back to work.

Cirno stared inquisitively. "... hey. Heyyyy! What are you doing?"

"Working," said Jim. His hands navigated through Excel tabs until he found his place again.

"Work's boring," Cirno said dismissively.

"Mhm, it is," Jim agreed. He didn't react, though, and that cut the wind out of Cirno's little sail.

"... if we both agree, you totally shouldn't be doing it. You should drop everything now and play."

“Can’t,” said Jim. “I got in trouble for seeing Gensokyo.”

He hated talking to a full grown woman like a kid, but fairies occupied that nebulous space of mental activity. Too aware to be counted as children, but also vacuous due to their small size and processing power. Cirno was the best example, in the sense that she was the most accurate depiction of a small-minded fairy to ever exist.

“So? Wanna break outta trouble?” Case in point.

That ominous suggestion made Jim stop what he was doing. “Do I want to know what you mean?”

Cirno crossed her arms proudly. “Trouble’s for the transient people. Not for me. You can’t pin trouble on a fairy, we just get away. That’s how fairies work!”

Jim quirked an eyebrow. “Elabora...” He shut his mouth. “Tell me what you mean.”

“If you don’t want to be in trouble, turn into a fairy! Like me! Oh, yeah, especially like me.”

“Your brain is melting,” Jim replied, waving the fairy off dismissively. “You’re not that strong.”

He missed a pluck of black hair turning into a blue-tinted ahoge antenna. “So please, I don’t mean to be rude, but fly on back home.”

The chair creaked as it turned back. The hydraulic piston holding the seat up was old, sure, but it could only complain so much from turning. This was different. This was a calculated differential of weight. A loss that went unnoticed. Then, Jim’s sleeves drooped a little. The legs of his slacks bunched up. His shoes subtly untied and his hands briefly lost track of where they were supposed to lay on the keyboard.

Briefly, of course. Muscle memory is hard to defeat, after all, and a couple inches down are a pittance to the mind. He soon got back to work, finding his QWERTY footholds again.

Cirno did not see what happened, nor was she aware that she did anything. Her frustration flared. She fluttered, climbed up the side of Jim’s monitor, a CRT relic, and pitched herself up top, bow-legged. “Are you listening?!”

“No,” said Jim, icily patient. Threads from his jacket undid themselves, and tied themselves in his hair, coaxing the locks around them to bristle with volume. The color bleached.

Cirno huffed. "That's rude!"

"I guess I am," said Jim, now sporting a short, blue crop with black tips. The bow holding it together was bigger than his head - which wasn't saying much in the grand scheme of things. "Rude, I mean. Mmgh, can't focus."

Jim rubbed his eyes to stay focused. For some reason, he felt mildly dizzy. He also felt a pang of frustration that he couldn't quite pin on Cirno. The reason could have been anything. The screen was too bright, or the keyboard tray was set too high, or perhaps he was finally reaching a new stage of exhaustion with official protocol. Irascible impatience nestled inside his heart. The gnawing feeling of wanting to do something else.

By the time his feet were dangling, the feeling graduated. It was chewing, and he was stirring.

By the time he was under four feet, Cirno noticed something was off. "Hey."

Jim narrowed his eyes.

"Heeeeey."

He blinked through eyelashes.

"Hey? Helloooo?"

Jim crinkled a softening nose. He bit a puffy lip. Why are excel functions so arcane? Why did he agree to do the logging himself?

Cirno sat and kicked her feet. "Jiiiiiiim?"

His focus popped a gasket. Jim sat back, closed his eyes, and let out a sigh so beleaguered, he lost a dozen inches and two dozen pounds. Cooler heads prevailed, though; he got ahold of himself before he exploded. "What?"

"You look funny."

Now that was a strange thing to say. Jim quirked an eyebrow at her. It flickered pale blue. "Really? That's what you wanted my attention for?"

Cirno shook her head. "Nah nah - funnier than usual. Something's weird."

Thunk thunk went Jim's shoes, dull on office carpet. Slipped his mind. He was so wrapped up in trying to get his focus back, he didn't notice his shoulder slipping through the collar of his button-up shirt. Neither did he notice a dress stitching itself together to give him a modicum of modesty.

This was, of course, because he was pouting. He was pouting with a very familiar face. "I oughta- I *should* flick you back to Gensokyo. Nothing's wrong. Everything is fine. I'm just-having a bad night."

That was a weird slip, wasn't it? Jim worked his jaw, unintentionally ironing out the boyishness and working in a feminine curve to his face. It felt out of character to be so short with anyone.

Rustle rustle went his clothes. There slipped another couple inches.

He was beginning to suspect something was up. The irritation was coming from somewhere. Yet it wasn't unfounded. It felt natural, like a limitation of his tolerance, but it was never this visceral. Freedom tugged at the corners of his vision. Shackles rankled in front of him. The urge to get up and procrastinate, putz around, was strong. He even flirted with the idea of speeding through the remaining data entry and throwing a few figures out off the top of his head. It's not like they would double-check. This was busywork.

The word struck him. Busywork. Jim didn't want to be busy with something so... so... no, not inane... *dumb*. That's it. Busywork was dumb. Like that, it clicked. His paradigm settled.

"I need a drink," he said suddenly.

"Gimme some soda, will ya?" Cirno asked. "I loooove soda."

Jim kicked off his pants unconsciously and crawled out of his shirt. He dropped to the floor on tiny, bare soles. Soda sounded better and better by the moment.

He turned the corner as a foot tall guy. Half a minute and some self-discovery later, he was she, and she floated back to her desk with a cross look on her tiny fairy face.

Not expecting to have her wish granted so literally, Cirno took a second to recognize what happened. When she connected the dots finally, she grinned. "... heeey! Hey, you turned

into me!"

Jim fluttered laboriously over to her workstation. She could've fit a Dasani in one hand a minute ago; now it was a chore to carry it in both. That, and the office was more of a landscape than a confined space. The shift in perspective was disorienting, but not necessarily bad.

That didn't mean she wasn't aware. Jim let the bottle drop with a hollow thunk on the desk. She stood atop the bottle cap, glowing with disappointment. Her emotions weren't subtle anymore, though she didn't mind. Fairies had big emotions, not little ones, and she certainly had big things to say.

"Yes, dummy!" she barked. "You could'a told me I was shrinking!"

Cirno balked. She raised her nose. "I told you you looked funny. How was I supposed to know?"

"How did I not know???"

"Because you were so busy thinking about your stupid project!"

Jim took offence at that for the wrong reasons. "It's not my project! Nuh-uh! I'm doing it because they told me too!"

Cirno blew a raspberry. "That stuff's for the biiiiiirds! You can't even type at that size."

Well, she could. One click at a time. Jim could imagine the process in her head, and quickly lost patience for it. "Not even gonna try," she pouted. "That'll take forever."

"Hey!"

Jim shot her double a look. "What?!"

"Get off the bottle! I wanna play~"

"What, you're gonna play?" She paused. "While I'm stuck with this?!"

Cirno giggled out loud, legs kicking against the monitor glass with a little tink-tink-tink. "You're the one saying you're stuck. Just get out. Who cares? I'm bored, and I wanna make snowmen with human water. That's all there is to it. I don't have to worry about



responsibilities, because I can't even spell that! You can join if you want! I'll free you, but only if you wanna be free. If you don't, well, you can go do dumb stuff if you want."

Jim the ice fairy fell on the side of confrontational justice and contrarianism in a brainspace this small. That was his fairy nature creeping up on decision making. Action, reaction, and then the dopamine burst of being right, or getting what she wanted. It was a simpler headspace, to be sure. On some level, she was aware of this. But on another, Cirno made a distractingly large amount of sense for someone habitually prone to stupid solutions.

Life was too short to get caught up in responbil-bils. Responsibis. Ressonsibilities. Things people want you to do, whatever! You knew what she meant! Grr!

With little left to support a task with no end, made worse by shrinking, and the reasons for being shrunk evaporating like ice cubes on a summer day, Jim came around. Reluctantly, she took flight, and began unscrewing the bottle.

"I'm still gonna get you for this," Jim grumped. It was a friendly grump. "Just you watch. I'll change myself back and then you'll be sorry."

"You're on~" Cirno answered, fluttering to the other side of the bottle top. "But who's the real fool, huh? The fool, or the fool who gets shrunk?"

Jim took a few seconds to figure out that parable, much to her chagrin. "... the fool! You dummy!"

"You're the dummy~"

"I'm you, so you're the dummy by prox!"

"Don't you mean proxy, fairy brain?"

"Says the pot, calling the kettle black, *freeze* brain!"

So it went. The workload sat untouched. The last autosave that night was 9:27pm. Meanwhile, the two fairies had their fun, trading silly insults and crystalizing distilled water into snow. Soon, that evolved into snowman rolling, snowball fights and races across the great canyons in the office, and pitched battles of frost and iron...

When his supervisor found him the next morning, Jim was well and truly tuckered out.